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SUBJECT: CHINA MANNED SPACE ENGINEERING OFFICE (CMSE) WELCOMES
HIGH-LEVEL BILATERAL DISCUSSIONS ON MANNED SPACE

BACKGROUND

1. (SBU) On December 8, ESTH Offs met with representatives from China's Man Space Engineering Office (CMSE) to discuss next steps for initiating bilateral discussions on cooperation in human spaceflight, as stipulated in the Joint Statement released during President Obama's visit to Beijing in mid-November. NASA Administrator Charles Bolden has tentative plans to make his first trip to China in April 2010, and NASA Assistant Administrator for External Relations Michael O'Brien will visit Beijing in early February 2010 to prepare for Bolden's trip. The meeting on December 8 was the first time Embassy officers have had an opportunity to interact directly with CMSE. (NOTE: While CMSE may be a non-military entity, it is well-known that ultimate authority for China's manned space program resides with the People's Liberation Army's General Armaments Department (PLA/GAD). END NOTE)

AN EVOLVING RELATIONSHIP ON MANNED SPACE

3. (SBU) Mr. GUO Guanchen, CMSE's Deputy Director for International Cooperation (Deputy Director General-level) led off the meeting by acknowledging that the space relationship between China and the United States had been a rocky one. Guo attributed this to the U.S. side but noted that in his view, the tenor of the relationship began to change in March 2009, when the Space Foundation--a U.S.-based organization dedicated to expanding space science and exploration--awarded the Foundation's prestigious annual award for achievements in space exploration to a group of Chinese manned space leaders and astronauts. (NOTE: Embassy Beijing helped expedite visas to the United States for this delegation so that they could make the awards ceremony in time, assistance which CMSE apparently still remembers positively. END NOTE) According to Guo, following their visit to the United States, CMSE hosted the Space Foundation

for a reciprocal visit to China. CMSE showed the delegation, which also included journalists from leading industry magazines "Aviation Week" and "Space Technology," all of the major manned space facilities in Beijing's "Space City," as well as the highly-restricted Jiuquan Manned Space Launch Center in Gansu Province.

14. (SBU) Guo further stated that he was pleased to see a "door opened" with respect to manned space and stated that CMSE would be open to a broad dialogue "about anything." In fact, CMSE already has been studying ways in which China and the United States can begin a dialogue on manned space, and said that CMSE would propose forming a small working group with NASA that can map out how a dialogue should proceed.

15. (SBU) In response to ESTH Counselor's query about the possibility of NASA Administrator Bolden visiting the Jiuquan Manned Space Launch Center during his April 2010 visit, Guo expressed some reluctance, citing that it would take three days just to reach the site from Beijing, and remained noncommittal. Nevertheless, he did boast of the "great visit" that the Space Foundation had taken to Jiuquan earlier in the year. Guo assured ESTH Counselor that previous difficulties associated with high-level NASA officials visiting the Jiuquan site were due to poor timing, but now that "proper groundwork" has been laid by the two presidents, China's space establishment may be more receptive to this latest request to visit Jiuquan.

TWO TRACKS AND TWO HOSTS: CMSE AND CNSA

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16. (SBU) With respect to who should "host" Administrator Bolden in April, Guo suggested that both CMSE and the China National Space Administration (CNSA) should serve as "co-hosts;" however, he made clear that CMSE does not want any overlap or mixing of the two schedules for the "manned" and "unmanned" tracks. (NOTE: Previous NASA interactions with Chinese space authorities have revolved around contacts with CNSA, the nominal lead for China's civilian space program, which could partially explain why previous requests to visit the Jiuquan facility were refused. END NOTE) Guo also indicated that CMSE meetings and site visits should take place first, suggesting that the Administrator spend the first three to four days with CMSE on manned space issues, and then conclude the trip with two days on "unmanned" issues, with CNSA as host. He also noted that CMSE and CNSA would issue separate letters inviting Administrator Bolden to China.

NEXT STEPS: DIPLOMATIC NOTES AND PREPATORY TALKS

17. (SBU) Guo further suggested that the best next step would be for Embassy Beijing to send separate diplomatic notes to CMSE and CNSA so that internal Chinese government inquiries and approvals can begin. In addition to specific details associated with Administrator Bolden's delegation, CMSE emphasized that the diplomatic notes should specifically welcome a reciprocal visit to the United States by an appropriate Chinese counterpart, and seemed interested in the suggested possibility of Chinese space officials attending a scheduled NASA shuttle launch in July 2010.

18. (SBU) CMSE agreed that a first meeting with NASA Assistant Administrator for External Relations Michael O'Brien face-to-face during his next trip to Beijing (currently February 1-3, 2010) would be an ideal way to lay the groundwork for the Administrator's April visit.

MEETING PARTICIPANTS

19. (SBU) The following CMSE officials participated in the meeting with ESTH Offs:

--Mr. GUO Guanchen, Deputy Director of International Cooperation (DDG-level), China Manned Space Exploration Office (CMSE)

--Mr. LIU Shujun, Deputy Director of the Planning Bureau
(DDG-level), CMSE

-Mr. NIU Aimin, Senior Engineer, Planning Bureau, CMSE

--Mr. ZONG Ye, Program Officer, Planning Bureau, CMSE (Zong will be
Post's primary working-level contact during this process.)

--Mr. FENG Wei, Program Officer, Planning Bureau, CMSE

19. (SBU) COMMENT: NASA currently is reviewing draft text of the
diplomatic notes. In order to ensure full coordination on this
effort, CMSE contacts will have a chance to offer additional input
on the exact wording of these diplomatic notes before they are sent
formally to recipients. Post anticipates that these diplomatic
notes will go out in final in early- to mid- January. During this
discussion with CMSE, interlocutors were not entirely dismissive of
CNSA; however, they did make it clear that they consider CMSE to be
at the top of the space hierarchy in China. END COMMENT.

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